

Georgie Donovan and Karen Estlund

New librarians and scholarly communication

Get involved

Georgie's story

My epiphany about inequities in scholarly communication occurred in 2001, while I was teaching English language and literature at the University of Atacama in Copiapó, Chile, a year before I considered attending library school. In addition to courses in literature and translation, I was trying to teach two composition and basic research methods courses with the same syllabi I used as a teaching assistant at the University of Texas–El Paso (UTEP). At UTEP I had access to five LANs and many databases, including MLA. Because other professors in Copiapó warned me that asking students to purchase additional texts might require a major financial sacrifice, I sought to use online information as much as possible.

I quickly realized that my university, though well equipped with computer labs and state-of-the-art computer classrooms, had access to virtually none of the scholarly databases I knew. As a substitute, I turned to finding scholarly information on the Internet and put my energy behind teaching students how to evaluate sources critically. At that time, however, few peer-reviewed articles were available freely online in any discipline, and I experienced firsthand the knowledge divide—where groups of individuals have vastly different levels of access to information. In my situation, even a small subset of scholarly work would have been priceless.

The open access movement has renovated the landscape of the Internet since I returned to the United States, completed library school, and started a professional career. If I were teaching in Copiapó today, my students could search journals in the *Directory of Open Ac-*

cess Journals, use institutional repositories to find pre- and post-prints of peer-reviewed articles, and access scholarship through several disciplinary portals. Regardless of whether the majority of scholarly publications ever become freely accessible online, the movement to advance the flow of information using the Internet affects not just university researchers here, but students, researchers, and thinkers around the world. My experience in Chile convinced me that increasing access and experimenting with new publishing models make a significant impact on scholarship and promote faster developments in research throughout the world.

Karen's story

In 2001, I obtained my bachelor of arts from a small liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest and accepted a job there as a copyrights assistant. A major responsibility entailed evaluating fair use and obtaining copyright permissions for library reserve, classroom handouts, and coursepacks. Thus, I entered the murky world of contracts, license agreements, and copyright law. In this setting, I first experienced how relevant the scholarly communication crisis was for education. I saw three significant problems while working with the current publication system. Professors cut

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readings from their syllabi so that students could afford to purchase coursepacks, frustrating their attempts to provide the education they wanted for their students. On one occasion, a faculty member was shocked when he learned that he had signed away the rights to his work, which was no longer his own to use for teaching. Lastly, the cost of affording these permissions was increasing at a rapid per-page rate, which cut deeply into the library budget. Permission fees averaged \$0.05 a page/copy in the 1990s but had risen by the year 2000 to an average of \$0.10 a page/copy.

In my second year of library school, I attended the ALA Midwinter Meeting in Boston. Unsure of which programs to attend, I found my interest piqued by a session from ACRL and SPARC on taxpayer access to information. The presentation addressed the problems of discovering the latest medical information and was followed by a very lively discussion from the audience and panelists. I learned that the typical U.S. citizen or U.S. doctor does not have access to the latest research results, a situation that can prove crippling to families with an ill family member. This session alerted me to efforts to require public access for publications from researchers who had received funding from the National Institutes of Health.

Like Georgie, access to information and quality education drove my interests in scholarly communication. Now, after fewer than two years as a professional librarian, I coordinate the University of Utah's institutional repository with the medical and law libraries and serve on a faculty subcommittee on scholarly communication. I believe that new models of scholarly communication will improve the current situation, but help is needed to bring about change.

Why get involved?

What is academic librarianship about?

Included in the mission statement of many academic libraries is a phrase similar to this: "The library supports the research and instruction of the university." Scholarly communication is essential to this mission and it is critical that the problem of the lack of resources and access to

scholarship be solved. This problem is important for new librarians who will be promoting the relevancy of their library to the university and beyond for many years to come.

Budgets

One of the first things we learn about scholarly communication is that the prices of journals—particularly those in science, technology, engineering, and medicine—have forced academic libraries across the country to reduce their expenditures for collections across all disciplines. The most recent statistics published by Association of Research Libraries¹ show that serials expenditures are up by 302 percent over figures from 20 years ago, rising almost four times faster than the inflation rate (the Consumer Price Index rose 78 percent over the same period). While the unit cost for serials has dropped over the past six years because of journal packages and bundling, the cost of serials title-by-title is still 167 percent more than it was in 1986. Monograph expenditures are also up by 59 percent over the same time period, and the unit cost of the average monograph is up 81 percent.

Library budgets are not increasing at a rate that comes close to matching the rising prices of journal subscriptions, and the disparity between funding and prices has created a perpetual problem for libraries that cannot be treated solely within the confines of collection development.

Changing nature of research

While much of the conversation about scholarly communication in the 1990s centered on budgets, other factors have fueled the development of new publishing models and advocacy for a more balanced intellectual property and scholarly communication landscape. Notably, scholars are becoming highly digital in their work methods and interactions with colleagues. The changing nature of research in disciplines across the board has prompted researchers, instructors, and students to look for improved ways of sharing information. Some factors stimulating the need to rethink our communications models include:

- increased reliance on reproduced materials for courses and study;
- the continued development of the free Web as a prime source for research;
- the integration of digital technologies into teaching and research;
- the growth of Web-based data and publications; and
- globalization and the intense need to do collaborative work with colleagues around the world.

The new practices of researchers, scholars, and students are driving many of the changes in the scholarly communication and publishing landscape.

What new librarians should know

Knowledge divide

When both of us were in library school quite recently, attention was given to the digital divide: the hardware and networking that separated the haves from the have-nots. It is increasingly apparent that there is not only a digital divide, but a knowledge divide between those who can access the best, most recent information and those who confront constant barriers to access. This inequity plays out even with information to which many people have equal claim, such as taxpayer-funded research.

It plays out when a state-supported Historically Black College or University cannot afford the journals that another state-supported college down the road can afford, when community college faculty members are contributing to journals to which their school cannot subscribe, and when a faculty member cannot reprint her own writing for her students.

New models of scholarly communication

Much progress has certainly been made in the last 20 years to devise solutions to the scholarly communication crisis, including:

- the open access movement to provide scholarly information freely on the Internet;
- new publishing models like BioOne, which is a cost-effective model for access to biological literature;
- institutional repositories that offer access to scholarly works produced at specific

institutions and other works that otherwise may not be published, such as data and supporting material;

- education for faculty about retaining the rights to their works; and
- legislation to ensure public access to research results funded by taxpayers.

Although the impact of these efforts is growing, this arena needs imagination, creativity, and energy to produce additional results.

Taking the step from awareness to action

For a new librarian, cultivating the skills to follow important issues in scholarly publishing and to articulate them to others can be challenging. Learning about the intricacies of copyright, mergers in the publishing world, and pending legislation takes time, but fortunately, many good resources exist to become familiar with the issues.

The November 2006 *C&RL News* article by Karla Hahn gives an excellent introduction to the tools available for librarians.² Programs at the ACRL National Conference and the ALA meetings, as well as other venues such as Charleston Conference, deeply explore the issues and cover exciting new developments. You can encourage your library to send a team to the ACRL/ARL Scholarly Communication Institute, which will lead to an action plan for the institution.

Librarians can write letters to legislators supporting legislation related to scholarly communication and ask library and university administrators to do the same. Meeting with legislators during the legislative day sponsored by your university or library organization, perhaps in partnership with the institution's government relations staff, is a productive way to make a difference. Faculty colleagues involved with faculty governance bodies and library committees on campus can be urged to pass resolutions supporting the tenets of these bills and local initiatives.

If there are no initiatives underway at an institution, even a new member of the library staff, freshly graduated from library school, can spearhead a brown bag series, where library